

MUSCICAPA RUFICAUDA SWAINSON, 1838 (AVES,
MUSCICAPIDAE): PROPOSED DESIGNATION OF NEOTYPE
BY USE OF THE PLENARY POWERS. Z.N.(S.) 2270

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England*)

The purpose of this application is to maintain the current usage of *Muscicapa ruficauda* Swainson, 1838, since the holotype on which it is based proves to belong to a species long and universally known as *M. unicolor* (Blyth, 1843), and is very different from that to which the name *M. ruficauda* has been applied for almost a century. If the provisions of the Code were strictly applied, a very confusing result would follow: the name *M. ruficauda* would be transferred to and replace the well known *M. unicolor*, and another name would have to be applied to what is currently universally called *M. ruficauda*. In the interests of stability, it is proposed that Swainson's holotype be suppressed by use of the plenary powers and that a neotype be designated from among specimens catalogued by Sharpe, 1879, who first applied unequivocally the name *ruficauda* in its modern sense.

2. When in 1840 William Swainson (1789-1855) emigrated to New Zealand, his collection of bird skins was disposed of to the University Museum of Zoology, Cambridge, England, wherein it is still extant. In this collection is a specimen marked in Swainson's handwriting "Muscicapa ruficauda Sw. Rufous-tailed Flycatcher. India". It agrees with the description of *Muscicapa ruficauda* Swainson (1838, *The Naturalists' Library, Flycatchers*: 251), particularly in a total length of six inches; white eye-ring; cinereous grey head (i.e., crown, "brighter on the sides", as indeed it is on one side); pale fulvous under tail-coverts, and a relatively stout, "shrike-like", bill. Swainson writes of "this specimen", indicating that he had only the one specimen. No other has been found in his collection. Thus the specimen in Cambridge must be regarded as the holotype. It bears the University Museum catalogue reference 27/Mus/31/pp/1. It agrees with females of the species known as *M. unicolor* (Blyth) (males are differently coloured).

3. The Swainson specimen apart, all the specimens referred to hereafter are in the British Museum (Natural History). It has been compared with 38 adult females of *Muscicapa unicolor unicolor* (Blyth, 1843, *J. Asiat. Soc. Bengal*, vol. 12: 1007), of the Himalayas and Burma east to Laos, and four of *M. u. harterti* (Robinson

& Kinnear, 1928, *Novit. Zool.*, vol. 34: 255), of south-east Asia, from Thailand to Sumatra, Java and Borneo. There is considerable individual variation in the female of *M. unicolor*, some specimens (regardless of the subspecies) having the crown olive-brown uniform with the mantle, others the crown grey with the mantle more olivaceous. The Swainson specimen is of this latter type, agreeing in colour particularly well with the following:— no. 86.4.1.3688, Manipur, India, 26 April 1881; 1948.80.540, Mogok, Katha District, Burma, 29 January 1934; 1936.4.12.2171, Gunong Tahau, Pahang, Malay Peninsula, 4 June 1905.

4. The following measurements in millimetres are from a sample of material of *M. ruficauda* and *M. unicolor* (both in the modern sense of Ali & Ripley, 1972, *Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan*, vol. 7: 150, 389):

	Wing	Tail	Bill (from skull)
		<i>M. ruficauda</i>	
10 males	75 – 80 (77.7)	54 – 60 (57.4)	15 – 16.5 (15.8)
10 females	73 – 81 (75.5)	53 – 60 (55.9)	14.5 – 16 (15.4)
		<i>M. u. unicolor</i>	
10 males	79 – 85 (82.2)	67 – 75 (70.3)	17 – 18.5 (17.8)
10 females	79 – 85 (81.3)	68 – 72 (69.7)	16 – 18 (17.0)
		<i>M. u. harterti</i>	
10 males	75 – 81 (79.1)	58 – 66 (62.0)	16 – 18 (16.9)
4 females	75, 76, 77, 79	54, 58, 60, 61	16.5, 17, 17, 18

5. *M. u. unicolor* is larger in all three measurements than *ruficauda* (modern sense), whereas in *harterti* the difference is only marked in bill-length. The Swainson specimen has wing 73, tail 54, bill 18 mm., figures which seem to agree best with female *harterti*. However, the tips of the outer primaries of the Swainson specimen have been broken off, while the bases of the central tail-feathers are in sheath, indicating moult. Thus both the wing and tail figures are artificially short. The bill-length is much longer than for any *ruficauda* (modern sense).

6. In general colour the Swainson specimen agrees with the adult female of the species *unicolor* (the adult male of which is very different, wholly blue above, predominantly so below), not with what is currently called *ruficauda* (in which the sexes are alike). Especially striking is the difference in tone of the rufous on the tail and its coverts, much darker in both races of *unicolor*; the darker underparts in *unicolor*, with much less white on the abdomen, and the under tail-coverts pale fulvous instead of plain white; and the

bill as a whole nearer black than sepia in *unicolor*, with only some tendency to whitish on the keel of the mandible, whereas in *ruficauda* the maxilla is sepia, the mandible as a whole whitish. In *unicolor*, too, the tarsus and feet are more robust. There cannot be any doubt whatever but that the Swainson specimen belongs with the species currently known as *M. unicolor*, not with that known as *M. ruficauda*. It has also been compared by D. Goodwin, of the British Museum (Natural History), and R. Wagstaffe, ex-Curator of Vertebrates, Merseyside County Museums, Liverpool, who both agree fully with this determination.

7. The next problem is to establish the first author who used the name *ruficauda* in the generally accepted modern sense. Blyth (1847, *J. Asiat. Soc. Bengal*, vol. 16: 120) describes *Butalis ruficauda* (Swainson), commencing "The beak of this species more resembles that of *B. grisola*, but is longer". Above on the same page he refers to "the European *Muscicapa grisola*", meaning what is currently called *Muscicapa striata* (Pallas, 1764), of which *Muscicapa grisola* Linnaeus, 1766, is a synonym (then in general use). However, it is at once apparent that the bill of *ruficauda* (modern sense) is not longer, but shorter, than that of *striata*. On the other hand the bill of *unicolor* is about the same length as in *striata*. This is borne out by Vaurie (1953, *Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist.*, vol. 100 (4): 511, 523), who gives the average length of bill as 17.0 for *unicolor*, 17.1 for *striata* and 15.7 for *ruficauda*. Thus Blyth was dealing with *ruficauda* Swainson (original sense), not with *ruficauda* (modern sense). Further support for this derives from his reference to the under tail-coverts being faintly tinged with "ferruginous" and to the "under mandible" with "little trace of whitish". Jerdon (1877, *The birds of India*, vol. 1: 468, as *Cyornis ruficauda*, Swains.) gives the same description of the under tail-coverts as does Blyth, and refers to the bill as "dusky". If Jerdon had been dealing with *ruficauda* (modern sense) he would surely have referred to the whitish mandible, contrasting with the dark maxilla. The description by Godwin-Austen (1870, *J. Asiat. Soc. Bengal*, vol. 39: 268), using the same name as Jerdon, is so flimsy that it is impossible to decide to which species he is referring. Gray (1869, *Hand-list of genera and species of birds*: 325, as *Niltava ruficauda*, Sw.) gives no description at all. Nor do any of the following, using the same combination as Jerdon: Brooks (1875, *Stray Feathers*, vol. 3: 235), Fairbairn (1876, *ibid.*, vol. 4: 257), Hume (1876, *ibid.*, vol. 4: 396), Butler (1877, *ibid.*, vol. 5: 228), Brooks (1877, *ibid.*, vol. 5: 470). In the last reference there is a comment "Dr. Jerdon was doubtful about *Cyornis ruficauda* being a good species, and he suspected the male to be blue". Brooks himself found the sexes to be alike in colour, so that he must have been considering *ruficauda* (modern

sense), although Jerdon seems to have had in mind *ruficauda* in the Swainson sense (i.e. modern *unicolor*). In the original description of *Cyornis unicolor*, Blyth (1843, *J. Asiat. Soc. Bengal*, vol. 12: 1007) had available only a blue male, still retaining "many of its mottled nestling feathers". Blyth (1847, *ibid.*, vol. 16: 128) only had an adult male; likewise Jerdon (1877, *The birds of India*, vol. 1: 465).

8. It must be concluded that the first unequivocal description of *M. ruficauda* in the modern sense is that by Sharpe (1879, *Catalogue of the birds in the British Museum*, vol. 4: 457, as *Siphia ruficauda*). This prestigious work established the consistent modern usage. The specimens a, b and c on which the description is based are still in the British Museum (Natural History). In colour "a" and "b" (adults) agree with adults of *ruficauda* (modern sense), in lacking sexual colour dimorphism, and are not females of *unicolor* or the similar Swainson specimen. Their measurements (they are not included in the sample in paragraph 4 above) also accord with this determination:—

		Reg. No.	Wing	Tail	Bill (from skull)
(millimetres)					
a.	Ad. Nellore (Jerdon)	45.1.10.47	73	56	16
b.	Ad. Female Himalayas (Stoliczka)	67.9.24.4	75	55	16
c.	Juv. Himalayas (Stoliczka)	67.9.24.5	75	56	14.5

9. In order to maintain current usage the holotype of *Muscicapa ruficauda* Swainson, 1838, must be set aside and specimen "a" above, from Nellore, should be designated as the neotype.

10. In an Appendix are given citations of use of the names *Muscicapa ruficauda* and *unicolor* respectively in the last fifty years, in accordance with Article 79 (b) of the Code. All uses of *ruficauda* cited are in the Sharpe (not the Swainson) sense. I do not know of any use of that specific name in the Swainson sense (equal to *unicolor*) in the past 100 years. In fact, the most recent use of *ruficauda* in the Swainson sense would appear to be by Jerdon, 1877, as cited in paragraph 7 above. By contrast, in the past 100 years *unicolor* as proposed originally by Blyth (or *harterti* for the south-east Asian subspecies, not recognised until 1928) has been universally used and is in current general use. In this same period, *ruficauda* has been universally employed for a different species, and I am unaware that any other specific name has ever been applied to

it. To revert to the use of *ruficauda* in the original sense of Swainson, 1838, and to adopt it in preference to *Cyornis unicolor* Blyth, 1843, would be contrary to the interest of stability in nomenclature.

11. The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature is therefore requested:

- (1) to use its plenary powers to set aside the holotype of the nominal species *Muscicapa ruficauda* Swainson, 1838, and, having done so, to designate as neotype the female specimen "a" cited by Sharpe, 1879: 457;
- (2) to place on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology:
 - (a) *ruficauda* Swainson, 1838, as published in the binomen *Muscicapa ruficauda*, with an endorsement that the holotype has been set aside by use of the plenary powers, and that specimen numbered 45.1.10.47 in the British Museum (Natural History) as cited by Sharpe, 1879: 457, has been designated as neotype of that species;
 - (b) *unicolor* Blyth, 1843, as published in the binomen *Cyornis unicolor*.

12. The foregoing proposals have the support of Professor S. Dillon Ripley, the distinguished student of Indian ornithology. Deep appreciation is also expressed to Dr. E. Eisenmann for his advice in the formulation of this application.

APPENDIX

A list of publications in which the names *Muscicapa ruficauda* and *M. unicolor* respectively have been used in the preceding fifty years:—

(1) *Muscicapa ruficauda* (all in the modern sense)

- ALI, S. 1953. *The birds of Travancore and Cochin*. London: Oxford University Press (p. 79, as *Alseonax ruficauda* (Swainson). Rufoustailed Flycatcher).
- ALI, S. & RIPLEY, S.D. 1972. *Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan*, vol. 7. Bombay, London and New York: Oxford University Press (p. 150, as *Muscicapa ruficauda* Swainson, Rufoustailed Flycatcher).
- BAKER, E.C.S. 1930. *The fauna of British India. Birds*, vol. 7. London: Secretary of State for India (p. 138, as *Alseonax ruficaudus* Swainson).
- BATES, R.S.P. & LOWTHER, E.H.N. 1952. *Breeding birds of Kashmir*. London: Oxford University Press (p. 107, as *Alseonax ruficaudus* (Swainson), Rufoustailed Flycatcher).
- EDWARDS, E.E. 1974. *A coded list of birds of the world*. Sweet Briar, Virginia: author (p. 127, as *Muscicapa ruficauda*, Rufoustailed Flycatcher).

- MORONY, J.J., BOCK, W.J. & FARRAND, J. 1975. *Reference list of the birds of the world*. New York: American Museum of Natural History (p. 109, as *Muscicapa ruficauda*).
- RIPLEY, S.D. 1961. *A synopsis of the birds of India and Pakistan*. Bombay: Bombay Natural History Society (p. 422, as *Muscicapa ruficauda* Swainson, Rufoustailed Flycatcher).
- VAURIE, C. 1953. A generic revision of flycatchers of the tribe Muscicapini. *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. 100 (4): 453–538 (p. 521, as *Muscicapa ruficauda* Swainson).
- VAURIE, C. 1959. *The birds of the palearctic fauna. Passeriformes*. London: H.F. & G. Witherby (p. 332, as *Muscicapa ruficauda* Swainson, Rufous-tailed Flycatcher).
- VOOUS, K.H. 1977. List of recent holarctic bird species. Passerines (part 1). *Ibis* vol. 119 (2): 223–250 (p. 246, as *Muscicapa ruficauda* Swainson, Rufous-tailed Flycatcher).
- WHISTLER, H. 1933. The Vernay scientific survey of the Eastern Ghats (ornithological section). *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*, vol. 36 (1): 67–93 (p. 86, as *Aleonax ruficauda* (Swainson)).

Prior to 1928, the name *ruficauda* was also used by:—

- HARTERT, E. 1910. *Die vögel der paläarktischen fauna* 1. Berlin: Friedlander and Son (p. 485, as *Muscicapa ruficauda* Swainson).
- OATES, E.W. 1890. *The fauna of British India. Birds* 2. London: Secretary of State for India (p. 36, as *Aleonax ruficaudus*, Rufous-tailed Flycatcher).

Although, as below, Gruson (1976) lists *M. unicolor*, he excludes *ruficauda*, evidently an inadvertent omission.

(2) *Muscicapa unicolor*

- ALI, S. & RIPLEY, S.D. 1972. *Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan*, vol. 7. Bombay, London and New York: Oxford University Press (p. 189, as *Muscicapa unicolor unicolor* (Blyth), Pale Blue Flycatcher).
- BAKER, E.C.S. 1930. *The fauna of British India. Birds*, vol. 7. London: Secretary of State for India (p. 134, as *Muscicapula unicolor* Blyth).
- CHASEN, F.N. 1939. *The birds of the Malay Peninsula* 4. London: H.F. & G. Witherby (p. 124, as *Cyornis unicolor harterti*, Malaysian Pale Blue Flycatcher).
- DEIGNAN, H.G. 1963. Check-list of the birds of Thailand. *Bulletin of the United States National Museum* 226: 263 pp. (p. 189, as *Muscicapa unicolor unicolor* (Blyth) and *Muscicapa unicolor harterti* (Robinson and Kinnear)).
- DELACOUR, J. 1947. *Birds of Malaysia*. New York: Macmillan (p. 288, as *Muscicapa unicolor*, Pale Blue Flycatcher).
- EDWARDS, E.E. 1974. *A coded list of birds of the world*. Sweet Briar, Virginia: author (p. 126, as *Muscicapa unicolor*, Pale Blue Flycatcher).
- GIBSON-HILL, C.A. 1949. An annotated checklist of the birds of Malaya. *Bulletin of the Raffles Museum* 20: 299 pp. (p. 212, as *Muscicapa unicolor infuscata* (Hartert), Pale Blue Flycatcher).

- GLENISTER, A.G. 1951. *The birds of the Malay Peninsula, Singapore and Penang*. London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press (p. 223, as *Muscicapa unicolor infuscata*, Pale Blue Flycatcher).
- GRUSON, E.S. 1976. *Checklist of the birds of the world*. London: Collins (p. 132, as *Niltava unicolor*, Pale Niltava).
- KING, B.F., DICKINSON, E.C. & WOODCOCK, M.W. 1975. *A field guide to the birds of South-East Asia*. London: Collins (p. 390, as *Cyornis unicolor*, Pale Blue Flycatcher).
- MEDWAY, Lord & WELLS, D.R. 1976. *The birds of the Malay Peninsula 5*. London: H.F. & G. Witherby (p. 349, as *Cyornis unicolor* (Blyth), Pale Blue Flycatcher).
- MORONY, J.J., BOCK, W.J. & FARRAND, J. 1975. *Reference list of the birds of the world*. New York: American Museum of Natural History (p. 109, as *Niltava unicolor*).
- RIPLEY, S.D. 1961. *A synopsis of the birds of India and Pakistan*. Bombay: Bombay Natural History Society (p. 431, as *Muscicapa unicolor* (Blyth), Pale Blue Flycatcher).
- ROBINSON, H.C. 1928. *The birds of the Malay Peninsula 2*. London: H.F. & G. Witherby (p. 135, as *Cyornis unicolor harterti*, Malaysian Pale Blue Flycatcher).
- SMYTHIES, B.E. 1953. *The birds of Burma* (2nd edit). Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd (p. 145, as *Muscicapa unicolor* Blyth, Pale Blue Flycatcher).
- VAURIE, C. 1953. A generic revision of flycatchers of the tribe Muscipini. *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History* vol. 100 (4): 453-538 (p. 510, as *Niltava unicolor* Blyth).

Prior to 1928, the name *unicolor* was also used by:—

- OATES, E.W. 1890. *The fauna of India. Birds 2*. London: Secretary of State for India (p. 22, as *Cyornis unicolor*, Pale Blue Flycatcher).